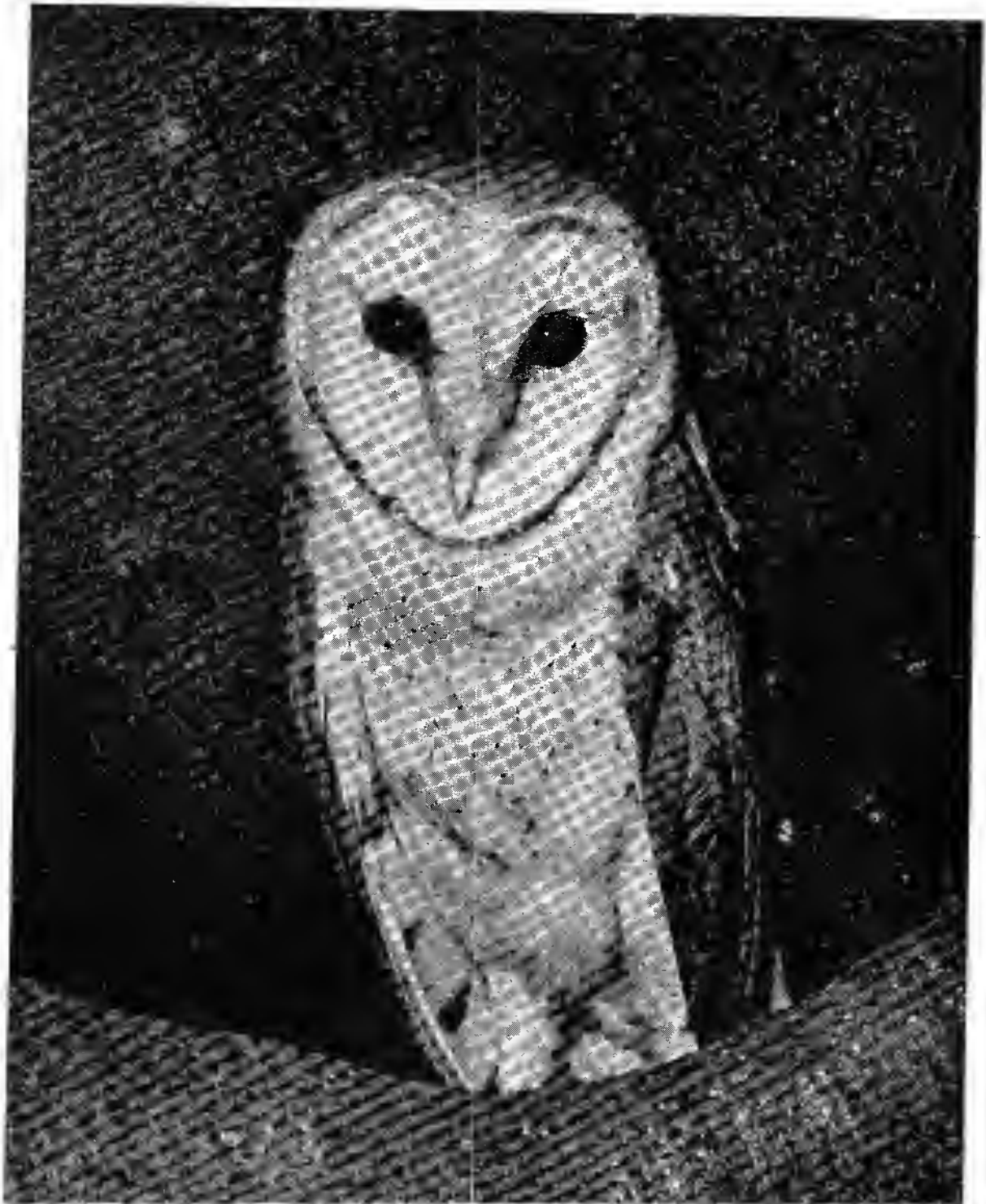


Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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FOR BIRDPWATCHERS

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Contents

- Editorial
- Waders and Water birds of Karnataka by S.G.Neginhal.
- Hingolghadh - a nature lovers paradise by Anwar Babi.
- Arm Chair bird watching continued by Lavkumar Khacher.
- Common birds of Dhawa, Jedhpur by B.D. Rana and R.N.Ram.

Correspondence

- Myna stuck in a wall crevice by Pankaj Sadaphal.
 - Eye colour in cuckoos by J.N. Prasad.
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Editorial

The Fall of a Sparrow: Many of you must have seen reviews of this title, the autobiography of Salim Ali. It is as expected a fascinating account of a life devoted to birds. I remember Salim Ali once telling me that whenever he sees a bird, he gets electrified, and that sort of response is essential to be able to undergo the hardships of which his life has been made. I remember the heat of the Rann of Kutch, and the cold of Bhutan, and also the painful nettles of that lovely land. I enjoyed these visits in Salim Ali's camps for a few days, but could not survive too long, without thinking of the comforts of home. All bird-watchers should buy a copy. As one reviewer says it will not be a disappointment even to those who are more interested in man watching than birdwatching.

Apologies to Subscribers: I am afraid there has been a change of Secretaries again, and I find that I am not a good systems man. I rely more on people than on paper records and this causes trouble. Can I request all subscribers to please send me their correct address again and my apologies to those who have paid but have not been receiving the Newsletter. I wish there was some way of tracing them. As usual as the New Year approaches, I resolve again to settle the mess on the next birthday (the 26th) of the Newsletter.

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Waders and water birds of Karnataka by S.G. Neginhal, IFS, Dy. Conservator of Forests, Green Belt Dn. 'Aranya Bhavan', Malleswaram, Bangalore: Karnataka State has a rich conglomeration of water and wading birds. It has large ancient reservoirs, and innumerable water tanks. It harbours eight major rivers and a number of minor river streams - all well-spread over from its northern frontiers to its southern tip. It has a long continuous stretch of western coast along the Arabian Sea. Geographically, the State is situated almost in the middle of South India, and the rivers and the sea coast, make for abundance in both endemic and migratory birds.

Among the endemic birds, the Dabchick (Podiceps ruficollis) is one of the commonest, found in almost all the shallow water ponds and water tanks. The Indian moorhen (Gallinula Chloropus), the Indian purple moorhen (Porphyrio porphyrio), the bronzewinged jacana (Metopidius

indicus), the pheasant-tailed jacana (Hydrophasianus chirurgus), the coot (Fulica atra), and the spotbill duck (Anas poecilorhyncha) are found, affecting reedy and vegetation covered shallow, ancient tanks. In these tanks, are also found cormorants (Phalacrocorax spp), the snake bird (Anhinga rufa), the lesser whistling teals (Dendrocygna javanica), and the cotton teal (Nettion coromandelianus). Around the foreshore areas of the dessicating tanks, wherever the habitat is suitable, birds like the paddy birds (Ardeola grayii), the night herons (Nycticorax nycticorax), cattle egrets (Bubulcus ibis), large egrets, medium egrets, little egrets (Egretta spp.) openbill storks (Anastomus oscitans), white ibises (Threskiornis melanocephala), black ibis (Pseudibis papillosa), spoonbills (Platalea leucorodia), whitenecked stork (Ciconia episcopus), and painted storks (Mycteria leucocephala) are found. The whitebreasted waterhen (Amaurornis phoenicurus) is sure to be found near the reedy water courses, ponds, and water tanks covered over with tall grasses and shrubs. Along the shingle banks of the rivers and on exposed boulders in the middle of the streams, are found the redwattled lapwings (Vanellus indicus), the great stone plovers (Scolecophagus magnirostris) and the large pied wagtail (Motacilla maderaspatensis). Although these are not strictly water birds, they like to be near the stony water habitats. The other interesting birds that are never far away from water, are the Indian river tern (Sterna aurantia), the kingfishers, the streaked weaver bird (Ploceus manvar), and the Indian cliff swallow (Hirundo fluviicola). The brahminy kite (Haliastur indus) and the crested serpent eagle (Spilornis cheela) also affect well-watered localities. The brown fish owls (Bubo zeylonensis) are invariably found in the neighbourhood of tanks and streams in wooded countryside.

The richest conglomeration of water and wading birds of Karnataka State are found at the Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary near Mysore, where fourteen species come to breed from May to October each year. This is a very compact Sanctuary, which offers spectacular sights for bird-watchers and excellent opportunities for ornithologists to closely study their breeding and feeding behaviour. It is also the bird photographers paradise - the photographs taken here have bagged the maximum number of prizes and awards at the National and International nature photographic exhibitions. The fourteen species that breed here are the three cormorants (the little, the medium and the large), the snake bird, the purple heron, the pond heron and the night heron, the four egrets (the cattle, the

large, the smaller, the little), the openbill stork, the white ibis and the spoonbill. A miniature Ranganathittu is found at Mandagadde (Shimoga District) on the Shimoga-Agumbe Road, where egrets, cormorants and snake birds, pond and night herons, breed from June to October.

During 1976, I discovered a pelicanry at Kokrebellur, near Rudraksipura of Mandya District, where the grey pelicans (Pelecanus philippensis) breed in the company of painted storks (Mycteria leucocephala) from middle January to May, each year. It was a chance discovery for me, the first prized record for Karnataka, and the fourth coveted record, for India. The grey pelicans breed on tall ficus trees here, and go to nearby Simsa river and bigger tanks like the Tailur for feeding. The painted storks nest both on the ficus trees along with the grey pelicans and separately on smaller trees like acacia arabica. Sometimes, the smaller adjutant stork (Leptoptilos javanicus) is also seen here. (A single pair of the smaller adjutant stork is found regularly breeding a top a tree near Bisalawadi tank at the Nagarhole National Park of Coorg District).

On the Bangalore-Mysore Highway, at Mattikere, grey herons (Ardea cinerea) are found breeding on a lone, giant, cylindrical boled ficus tree in company with little cormorants in summer. The dessicating tanks around offer the food, and the tall ficus tree the necessary protection for these breeding birds.

Several Sula daatyla have been washed ashore this year. A frigate bird (Fregeta sp.) was found on the seaboard near Udupi (South Kanara), a couple of years ago. These birds breed in Seychelles and Aldabra Islands, near Africa, to the far west of the western coast of India. The well-known piracy bird, the skua (Catharacta sp.) of the Antarctic Peninsula was recovered at Udupi in 1964. The great black-headed gull (Larus ichthyaetus) of Mangolia and Tibet, the laughing gull (Larus ridibundus) of Europe and Central Asia, are found haunting our western sea coast during the winter. The brownheaded gull comes to inland waters upto Krishna-rajsagar reservoir near Mysore, and to almost all the bigger water tanks upto Hebbal tank near Bangalore, in addition to invading the coast from Karwar to Mangalore, affecting coastal lagoons and backwaters, tidal creeks and estuaries and harbours. The Indian whiskered tern (Chlidonias hybrida), the gullbilled term (Gelochelidon nilotica), the Caspian tern (Hydroprogne caspia), the large crested sea tern (Sterna bergii), and the Indian lesser crested sea tern (Sterna bengalensis) are the other winter visitors to our sea coast.

The other wintering birds of interest that come to our seaboard and the inland water courses, tanks, reservoirs, streams and rivers are the little ringed plovers (Charadrius dubius), the Kentish plovers (Charadrius alexandrinus), whimbrels (Numenius phaeopus), curlews (Numenius arquata), redshanks (Tringa totanus), greenshanks (Tringa nebularia), marsh and green sandpipers (Tringa stagnatilis) and (T. ochropus), the wood and the common sandpipers (Tringa glareola and T. Hypoleucos), the common and other snipes (Capella sps.) little stints (Calidris minuta), black-winged stilts (Himantopus himantopus), common teal (Anas crecca), brahminy ducks (Tadorna ferruginea), garganeys (Anas guerequedula) and pintails (Anas acuta). The barheaded goose (Anser indicus) that breeds in Ladakh, comes as far south as the Tungabhadra river, and even southern perhaps, affecting rivers and large streams along their shingle banks in winter. Flamingoes (Phoenicopterus sp.) on their southern migratory routes, are found resting over night at some of our larger ancient water tanks, like the Magad tank of Dharwad district. Loose parties of white storks (Ciconia ciconia) come upto Hebbal tank near Bangalore at the end of the wintering season, perhaps, on their return journey to Europe,

There are some more interesting birds that visit our State in their wintering days, that are not water or wading birds, but which are associated with aquatic habitats and marsh lands. The Ospreys (Pandion haliaetus) that breed in Europe and north of our country, is one such species and are found in our reservoirs like the KRS and Ranganathittu throughout the winter. The marsh harriers (Circus aeruginosus) are found along the canals flooded paddy fields and foreshores of tanks. The handsome pied harrier (Circus melanoleucos) is often seen hovering stationary or in a low sailing flight over the grassy margins of irrigation canals and paddy fields.

Hingolghadh - A nature lovers paradise by Anwar Babi

Hingolghadh is a truly beautiful place in every sense of the word. The countryside around is said to resemble England's Lake District. In the monsoon there are lakes all round. Wherever the eye moves there are sheets of water shimmering in the blue haze. The clouds surround the castle when the ceiling is low and cut us off blissfully from the harsh world. The castle has in recent

times been used as a summer retreat, and is situated on top of a huge hillock, overlooking hills, dales and lakes.

Adapted for its more recent roles with exquisite taste, Hingolghadh has huge rounded towers and sheer cliff like buttressed walls overlooking which are lofty balconies from which the view is breath-taking. The large rooms, with their high rafters, have windows opening in all directions. No where does one feel the intrusion of anything but pure nature.

During the monsoon the grassland is visited by the Florican which comes to breed there. It is a beautiful little bustard that flaunts itself by jumping up and down to attract its mate. After the chicks are hatched, the florican leaves us for the south. The great Indian bustard is now very rare but some have been photographed here on nests. A resident bird, it is huge and looks like a giant plover..... Continuing our tour of the castle surrounds, we come across a little sleepy village. It is a little warmer here down below. Sheep graze nearby bleating away unmindful of the occasional buses and trucks climbing the steep hill in low gear. There are sheep pens and the lambs are fluffy and lovable. A little further away is a galaxy of lakes surrounded by dry shrubs and willow trees. If you lift their green veil you may see some duck and water birds. The warbling of the lesser whitethroats and other warblers and the bright red streaking of the small minivets leaves one breathless. The little grebes or debchicks will not fly even if you shoot at them. They rather dive with startling speed and appear a few yards away hence their reputation of sticking to the water even in the face of imminent danger. In winter one finds a few shovellers, pintails, mallards and widgeons. Otherwise the place abounds with pheasant tailed jacanas, moorhens, wagtails, coots and cormorants.

The nukta or combed duck is a resident duck - our answer to the ruddy or shelduck and the brahminy duck, which are winter visitors. The brahminis incidentally come from Tibet and central Asia where I am told some of them used to breed on the window sills of the Dalai Lama's palace. Hingolghadh, being on the great migratory route of practically every migrant bird can be developed into a first class Bird Ringing Station, perhaps unique in the world.

Along with the ringing of birds in the winter and monsoon, observation posts could be created to watch, record and photograph birds and animals at very close ranges. Snared ducks and geese could be used as decoys to attract

more wild water fowl and if possible arrangements made to trap some of them with Heligoland nets and have them stay with us round the year. Hide-outs for artists and photographers could be situated near the watering places, and the songs and calls of the birds could be ideally recorded in their natural habitat.

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Arm Chair Bird Watching continued (from page 12, vol. XXV, No. 7 and 8) by Laxkumar Khacher, Jayant Society, Raikot:
 Black bulbul Hypsipetes Madagascariensis is another of those birds with an incorrect name. It is grey, has a very untidy black crest, red bill, eyes and legs and a comparatively longish and decidedly forked tail. The better name would have been grey bulbul or drongo bulbul. Call it what you like, they are among my most familiar species, very quarrelsome, very noisy and going around in rabbles, from tree to tree. A pair regularly rests in the fruit trees across the stream and this keeps them almost all the time in my view. Unfortunately my favourite, the white-cheeked bulbul Pycnonotus leucogenys is ~~not~~ as plentiful as it might be, though this summer a pair has been around the house and I am hoping they will settle in permanently. It is hard to accept the fact that this attractive bird with its prominent forward curling crest is but a subspecies of the whitecheeked bulbul of the Punjab, Rajasthan and Kutch semi desert areas. Apart from the yellow vent there is nothing which should suggest this kinship. Formerly the plains subspecies was designated as a distinct species and known as the white cheeked bulbul - or was it the other way round?

Some of the robinea trees have their foliage lobbed off to provide fodder for domestic stock and their bare branches are favoured vantage points for the grey drongo Dicrurus leucophaeus pair. This is a very aptly named bird, has a very slender built with a proportionately long forked tail compared to the black drongo or king-crow of the plains. This mountain species captures most of its food by sallying after winged insects and forages on the wing inside the crowns of trees. Its a great acrobat and very mobile. The grey drongo lacks none of the dash of its plains' cousin and swiftly attacks crows or raptors passing through. It spreads out into the plains during winter when it is often overlooked as a black drongo.

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Common birds of Dhawa. Jodhpur by B.D.Rana and R.N.Ram. Animal Studies Division, Central Arid Zone Research Institute, Jodhpur 342 003; Dhawa is located 50 km away South of Jodhpur, on the Jodhpur-Barmer Road. The average annual rainfall is 366 mm and the maximum and minimum temperatures are 34.4°C and 21.0°C respectively. The relative humidity varied from 19 to 52 per cent (av. 35 per cent). The grass cover is represented by Eleusine compressa, Cenchrus setigerus, C. Ciliaris, Eragrostis ciliaris, Dactyloctenium aegyptium and Chorcorus tridens. Among kharif crops, bajra (Pennisetum typhoides) is chiefly grown in this area.

We arrived at Dhawa on 23.8.1985 and stayed in the Guest house of the Forest Department, constructed by the Rajasthan State Government in this Wildlife Sanctuary. The following birds were sighted from 23.8.1985 to 25.8.85 around Dhawa: the Jungle crow, Corvus macrorhynchos, the house sparrow, Passer domesticus, the whitethroated munia, Lonchura malabarica a bush chat, Saxicola caprata, the ring dove, Streptopelia decaocto, the green bee eater, Merops orientalis, the Pied bushchat, the little brown dove, S. Senegalensis, the jungle babbler, Turdoides striatus, the common babbler, Turdoides caudatus, the brahminy myna, Sturnus pagodarum, the common myna, Acridotheris tristis, the house crow, Corvus splendens, the grey partridge, Francolinus pondicerianus, the red vented bulbul, Pycnonotus cafer, the peacock, Pavo cristatus, the redstart, Phoenicurus ochruros the blue rock pigeon, Columba livia and rose ringed parakeet, Psittacula krameri, the grey shrike, Lanius excubitor and the rufous backed shrike, Lanius schach.

The following scavengers were sighted soaring in the sky: the black winged kite, Elanus caeruleus, the tawny eagle, Aquila rapax, the white scavenger vulture, Neophron percnopterus.

Among aquatic birds, found around water holes on the outskirts of Dhawa village were the pond heron, Ardeola grail the little egret, Egretta garzetta, the Dabchick, Podiceps ruficollis, the cattle egret, Bubulcus ibis, the red wattled lapwing, Vanellus vanellus, the red shank, Tringa totanus, the common sandpiper, Tringa hypoleucos, the Indian courser Cursorius coromandelicus. The other bird fauna were represented by the woodpecker, Micropernus brachyurus, the hoopoe, Upupa epops, the black bellied finch lark, Ammodramus grisea, the blue jay, Coracias benghalensis and black bird, Turdus merula.

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Correspondence

Myna stuck in a wall crevice by Pankaj Sadapal,

Twenty days back a common myna got stuck in a crevice between two vertical walls perpendicular to each other just outside my house. It must have been looking for a nest site or probably was just inquisitive about the crevice. Anyhow, its whole head got stuck there. It tried in vain to get out by pushing with its legs and wings, thus making a number of blood tainted scratches. The myna survived a full 30 hrs. while I had been observing it before it died. There was no means of retrieving it, it was so out of reach, the crevice being about 50 feet from the ground. The dead myna with its dangling legs and wings stayed fixed for a week before it disappeared from that gap. Incidentally, while it was 'alive' and 'kicking', a pair of mynas sat on a nearby perch and speculated. Frequently one of them launched itself on to the stuck myna and gave it a series of hard pecks, probably to try and free the stuck myna. That is the only explanation I have of this behaviour

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Eye colour in cuckoos by J.N.Prasad

I had an opportunity to observe the colour change of the eye of a young coucal, being reared in a mini zoo. Initially it was dark brown, later it slowly turned to a dull colour somewhat brownish orange; and after a few months to scarlet, and then finally it acquired a blood-shot hue. Thus, I think, the cuckoos develop the characteristic red eyes at a later age, i.e., when they are no longer dependent on their foster parents, even though coucals are not parasitic on other birds. As is well known they build their own nest concealed in a thick undergrowth of vegetation.

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Cover Picture: BARN OWL (TYTO ALBA) — Courtesy E. HANUMANTHA RAO

Editor: Zafar Futehally

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